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THE LITERATURE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR, 1899-1902¹

THE interest of the general public in the narratives of a campaign is unfortunately in inverse ratio to their historical accuracy and value. A few hours after a great action crowds mad with excitement are struggling thousands of miles away for successive editions of journals containing the latest bulletins of generals and the telegrams of war correspondents. Yet both bulletins and telegrams have been written on the field of battle with haste and imperfect knowledge of the facts and are the product of brains too overwrought for sound judgment. The letters of the correspondents and the personal despatches of the general in command which follow are read by many, but with less avidity than the telegrams. The former are expanded in book form, and become for the majority of the public the Ultima Thule of their studies of the war. The success of these books depends on their being placed on the market as soon as possible after the events which they record have taken place, and on their being written in graphic style with due regard to popular views and prejudices. The man in the street gets what he wants. If ill fortune has dogged the footsteps of a general, his shortcomings will be exposed with much candor to the indignant public by these rapid makers of history. If on the other hand a leader should be receiving worship as a popular hero, no whisper of the mistakes, which escaped paying a penalty, or of the happy accidents which insured victory will be allowed to appear. Even with the most honest desire to tell the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth, the writers of this class of books are foredoomed to fail in presenting any accounts which can in after years be regarded as a serious contribution to history. And this for two reasons: they are too near to the events with which they are dealing to look at them with a true focus; and the details of the events themselves are still wrapped in a confused tangle, only to be unravelled by strenuous labor and prolonged research.

¹ A "List of Works in the Library of Congress on the Boer War," compiled under A. P. C. Griffin, is printed in *Selected Translations pertaining to the Boer War*, published in Washington, 1905, by the Military Information Division of the General Staff, pp. 207-231. The German books on the war are mostly noted under "Kriegsgeschichte" in the *Allgemeine Militär- und Sport-Bibliographie*, vols. 8 to 12. For other works in various languages see the quarterly *List of Military Publications . . . received in the Adjutant-general's Office, War Department* (Washington). Ed.

These causes no doubt affect the making of all history, but for military historians they have a special force. The object of military history is not the mere elucidation of the truth, the vindication of a great commander's reputation, or the pricking of the bubble of unmerited fame, but its true aim is to deduce, from the experiences of the past, lessons which may assist soldiers in the performance of their duty in future campaigns. Such lessons are not to be harvested without toil, the toil not only of the men who have won victory by their sweat and blood, but of those whose duty it is to collate and piece together the disjointed evidence of the staff, batteries, battalions, and regiments composing the contending force, and after due testing, sifting, and comparison to construct from this raw material a consistent narrative which, so far as human fallibility permits, may present to the reader a true picture. The difficulty of this task has been much augmented by the conditions of modern war. The great increase in the range of firearms, in the extension of troops, and in the size of armies renders it more and more impossible for any one man, be he commander-in-chief or war correspondent, or even for a large staff to follow at the time with any accuracy the detailed movements of units in action. Waterloo was fought ninety-one years ago; not a survivor is left with us. Yet that great struggle is a vineyard in which historians still labor. The harvest of a modern campaign may take even longer in reaping.

Every war and every field of battle is not, however, rich enough in military lessons to justify such close gleaning and re-gleaning. The narrative of many of the small wars of which the British army, beyond all other armies in the world, has the fullest experience, is confined to official telegrams and a despatch published some months afterward in an obscure corner of the *London Gazette*. Others of more importance have perhaps been favored with the presence of war correspondents whose reports throw light on side issues and give color to the dry official documents. A few attract sufficient public attention to give birth later to a literature of their own. But even if such literature should be created, it but seldom attains the dignity of historical research. Even the greater campaigns often fail to reach the higher plane on which the true scientific spirit of history holds sway. Of all the wars of the nineteenth century, the Napoleonic struggle, the Civil War in America, and the Franco-German War of 1870-1871 can alone be placed in the latter class, and have alone been subjected by generations of students to that process of scientific winnowing of evidence by which true history is finally secured. Over the wars other than those great contests—

such as the 1848 Campaign, the struggle for Schleswig-Holstein, the 1866 Campaign, the Russo-Turkish War, the British occupation of Egypt and the Soudan, and possibly the American-Spanish War, has fallen a haze of obscurity, which history seems unlikely to lift.

Thus it may be legitimate for historical purposes to classify campaigns in four groups: (1) purely local expeditions of no interest to the outside world, (2) the small wars of some temporary but no permanent importance, (3) the campaigns of considerable temporary interest but which fail to become landmarks in the history of the world, and (4) the contests which influence decisively the development of great national communities.

Time is needed before any particular campaign can be finally assigned to one of these groups. It is as yet premature to classify the South African War of 1899-1902, but it would seem doubtful if it will attain the highest rank. This doubt as to the position which the campaign will occupy in the eyes of future historians renders it difficult to estimate how far we are approaching finality in its historical examination. The assertion lately made in certain quarters, that everything that the general public cares to know has already been written, is, however, clear proof that the stream of popular ephemeral books which pours from the press during and immediately after a campaign, exciting national enthusiasm, has run dry, and that future literature will be confined to the professional scientific researches of the soldier and the historian. It is proposed in the present paper to review briefly the first class of works, and subsequently to discuss how far progress has as yet been made in the latter direction.

Of the popular literature the first in the field were naturally the narratives of the war correspondents, who followed the fortunes of the British forces in the eastern or western theatres of war during the first nine months or year of the campaign. At the outset it will be remembered that Natal was the decisive point, and that thither the representatives of the leading London journals congregated. James of the *Times*, Steevens of the *Daily Mail*, Stuart of the *Morning Post*, Bennet Burleigh of the *Daily Telegraph*, Maxwell of the *Standard*, and Pearse of the *Daily News*. All of them were shut up in Ladysmith except Bennet Burleigh, who slipped south when he saw his communications with the outer world threatened, and attached himself later to Buller's force. Many of them collated their experiences in book form. Of the stories of the siege the most vivid (although alas! incomplete, for enteric claimed the author as its victim early in January, 1900), was *From Cape Town*

to *Ladysmith*,¹ written by the brilliant pen of Steevens, a man beloved alike by soldier and journalist, who had the rare gift of combining in his word-pictures accuracy of statement with color and life. The other narratives of the three first weeks in Natal with their brilliant little actions of Talana and Elandsblaagte, the retarding fight at Reitfontein, the skilful retreat from Dundee, the mournful Monday of Lombard's Kop and Nicholson's Nek, and of the four long months during which Sir George White held the main Boer army at bay have hardly received full justice at the hands of the able journalists who witnessed them. A siege is trying to all who are in the inner circle, but for war correspondents, whose duty it is to keep the public informed from day to day of the progress of operations, the bad luck of being cut off for the third of a year from the outer world, save for such precarious means of communication as pigeons and runners, was the most cruel of misfortunes. Imperceptibly the disappointment, the strain of doing nothing when they desired to be most active, overshadowed their spirits and in a manner warped their judgment. The hardships of the siege are fully set out in their narratives, but the strategic value of keeping the flag flying, of containing the main striking force of the republics, and thus covering directly southern Natal, and indirectly Cape Colony, was not grasped or appreciated.

Of the popular narratives dealing with the relief of Ladysmith, *The Natal Campaign* by Bennet Burleigh² and *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria* by Winston Churchill³ are the most valuable. Mr. Bennet Burleigh has a high reputation as a war correspondent; he has witnessed much fighting in every quarter of the globe, and can be trusted to put down frankly and truthfully what he sees and hears. That in common with nearly all his brethren of the pen he fails to display knowledge of the higher branches of the great game of war is hardly surprising, for, although the national judgment is much influenced by the reports of the press representatives from the seat of war, the need of systematically training such guides to public opinion in the performance of their responsible duties has not yet been accepted in democratic communities. Yet not only does the professional future of commanders of armies at times depend on popular verdicts hastily formed under such amateur guidance, but the force of public opinion at home, directed into wrong channels, not infrequently exercises an unfortunate influence over the conduct of operations in the field.

¹ London and New York, 1900.

² London, 1900.

³ London, 1900.

Mr. Churchill's book on the Natal campaign is of a different character. It will be remembered that, after a few years' service as a subaltern in the Ninth Hussars, that officer found a soldier's duties in peace time not sufficiently exacting to satisfy the demands of ambition and his desire for a strenuous life. He determined to follow in his father's footsteps, and exchanged his sword for a political career. But in the intervals of wooing popular favor he found time to observe as a war correspondent the operations of General Shafter in Cuba. When the South African war broke out, Churchill accepted a similar mission from the *Morning Post*, and as the correspondent of that journal was attached to Sir Redvers Buller's force in Natal. Made prisoner by the Boers in an armored train, which was pushed toward the Tugela at the end of November, 1899, he was taken to Pretoria, but escaping from his jailers made his way across the veld to Delagoa Bay, and thence returned to Durban in time to be present at Spion Kop and the actions which resulted in the relief of Ladysmith. In this latter phase he abandoned the pen and did good service as an officer in an irregular corps. The narrative of these adventures has a romance of its own, enhanced by the writer's present position and possible future, but it may be ranked rather as the exposition of a remarkable personality than as a contribution to scientific history.

Nor, too, can it be fairly held that the war correspondents with Lord Roberts's army in its advance through the Free State and Transvaal made as a body any valuable additions to historical literature. To this statement exception might be made in favor of *With General French and the Cavalry in South Africa*¹ by Charles S. Goldman. Mr. Goldman was attached to General French's command as a correspondent from the date of that officer's landing in Natal, and remained with him until the occupation of Barberton. His book deals with all that skilful fencing at Colesberg which first established French's reputation, with the relief of Kimberley, with the holding up of Cronje at Paardeberg—the finest cavalry feat of the war, with the occupation of Bloemfontein, with Sanna's Post, and with the whole of the subsequent advance to Pretoria, and thence eastward to the Portuguese border. The first chapters moreover describe the Natal fights at Elandslaagte and Lombard's Kop. The author, as a civilian, pretends to no personal military knowledge, but he was fortunate enough to win the confidence of French's staff, and in the preparation of his book is believed to have enjoyed the assistance of French's right hand—that

¹ London, 1902.

prince of staff officers, Major-general Haig—and of his Intelligence Officer, Major Lawrence. Aided by these special advantages and with the gifts of a shrewd perception and an appreciation of the value of details in a military narrative, he has produced a book which, while attractive to the general reader, cannot be disregarded by either the military student or the historian. An excellent series of maps, based in many cases on military sketches made on the ground, adds much to the value of this work, and although Mr. Goldman has not escaped the influence of the hero-worship inevitable in the biographer, his work is not likely to be rivalled as a fair account of the achievements of the British cavalry commander during the first year of the South African War.

But except from Mr. Goldman's book, not much valuable ore can be delved from this particular corner of the mine of campaigning literature. Some bright color and an appreciation of the light in which Lord Roberts's victories appeared to onlookers may, however, be gathered from Mr. Prevost Battersby's *In the Web of a War*,¹ which carries the story down to the occupation of Pretoria. The lessons, however, deduced by Mr. Battersby from his observations, as for instance that cavalry should carry no other weapon than the rifle, are not to be commended to soldiers. For vivid journalistic sketches of daily life in South Africa during the latter part of the war, a reader cannot do better than turn to *Unofficial Dispatches* by Edgar Wallace,² the *Daily Mail* correspondent, who depicts with a faithful pen, not so much the actual fighting, but the passions, words, and appearance of the people who fought and of those who looked on. It throws much light on the effect of prolonged civil war on combatants and civilians. *With Seven Generals in the Boer War*, by Colonel Pollock,³ a Reserve officer, who was allowed to act as one of the *Times* correspondents, may also be glanced at, as a record of facts noted by the trained eye of the soldier who has studied his profession. Colonel Pollock's book may be regarded therefore as lying half-way between the journalistic and the professional classes of literature.

At this half-way house should perhaps also be placed the diaries and records of the volunteers and irregulars who played such a gallant part in the war. *With Rimington*, by March Phillipps;⁴ *A Subaltern's Letters to his Wife*;⁵ *The Record of the Mounted*

¹ H. F. P. Battersby, *In the Web of a War* (London, 1900).

² London, 1901.

³ London, 1900.

⁴ London, 1901.

⁵ By Reginald Rankin, London, 1901.

Infantry of the City Imperial Volunteers, by Lieutenants Scott and McDonnell;¹ *One Thousand Miles with the C. I. V.*, by J. Barclay Lloyd;² and *Two Years at the Front*, by Lieutenant Moeller,³ may be taken as typical specimens of this group of the South African literature. They are all written from the personal point of view of the author, either as an individual seeing war for the first time, or as a member of a unit whose share in the operations he desires to place on record. They are not quite of the same value as the regimental histories of regular corps, seeing that the writers lack the professional training which would enable them to discern the facts of importance to the professional student. Thus the text of the orders actually issued to the troops, the formations in which they marched and fought, their fine discipline, he has ignored. On the other hand the dramatic incidents of a fight, the personal experiences of the writer, the food and shelter he obtains from time to time, are set forth with superfluous ampleness. The chief value of such books lies in their laying open to an investigator the spirit and thoughts of the amateur soldier who, moved by patriotism and love of adventure, throws aside his normal work in life and, rifle in hand, thrusts himself forward in defense of the nation's interests. The actual facts and figures such narratives contain should, however, be accepted with caution, and when possible verified by reference to official despatches and records.

The observations of the regular soldiers who played a part in the war must of necessity be offered a higher rank than those of amateurs. Unfortunately not many as yet have been confided to the hands of a publisher. Professional officers shrink justly from criticizing the actions and orders of superiors, many of whom are still in high places; and, although some of the principal actors in the scene such as Lord Roberts, Sir Redvers Buller, Sir George White, Sir Henry Colville, and Major-general Gatacre (the last of whom lately passed over to the majority) are no longer holding active commands, yet, while they live, a full and frank discussion of their merits and demerits is hardly to be expected from professional critics. Two books, however, have appeared, which cannot be ignored: *The Work of the Ninth Division*, by Major-general Sir H. Colville,⁴ and *Words by an Eyewitness: the Struggle in Natal* by "Linesman".⁵ Sir H. Colville's work is of peculiar interest. One of the group of Guardsmen, who devote their lives and energies whole-heartedly to the profession of arms, he entered on the South

¹ London, 1902.

² London, 1900.

³ London, 1903.

⁴ London, 1901.

⁵ London, 1901.

African War with active service experience won in the Soudan and Uganda, both of which campaigns had been portrayed by his own pen. During Lord Methuen's advance from the Orange River Colville was brigadier of the Guards Brigade, a situation which he filled so satisfactorily at Belmont, Graspan, the Modder, and unlucky Magersfontein that on the eve of Lord Roberts's march he was promoted to the command of the new Ninth Division, made up of the Highland and Smith-Dorrien brigades. In that capacity he figured at the battle of Paardeberg, although but little scope was then given by Lord Kitchener's overmastering personality for the exercise of the responsibilities usually attached to a divisional commander. Moreover, in common with his colleague Kelly-Kenny, the other divisional general present, Colville differed from the chief of the staff's conception that one determined effort would suffice to break down the resistance of Cronje's burghers and rush the laager. Events proved the divisional commanders to be right in their forecast; but from that time Colville seems to have lost ground at headquarters. Two months later he was despatched in hot haste from Bloemfontein with his division to disentangle Broadwood's column from the trap of Sanna's Post. He arrived to find the fight over, and his infantry soldiers, already weary by a forced march, were easily evaded by De Wet's mounted commando, retiring hastily with its booty of captured guns and wagons. No direct censure was conveyed to Colville for this failure, but his command was slowly cut down to a brigade and a couple of guns. Accompanied by this force, he was on the march from Lindley to Heilbron in June, 1900, when he received a request for help from the officer commanding a newly raised Irish Yeomanry regiment which had been cut off at Lindley in his rear. Colville conceived his orders from headquarters to preclude his retracing his steps. The Yeomanry surrendered, and the lieutenant-general was deprived of his command and sent home. Sir Henry's book deals with these events naturally from his point of view, and is in substance an *apologia*. Much can no doubt be said on both sides. There are some who still think that the superseded general had somewhat hard measure dealt to him. Others will rightly lay stress on the magnitude of a commander-in-chief's responsibility to the nation and the army, and on the necessity laid upon him for subordinating all personal considerations to the need of securing leaders in whom he can place absolute confidence. Be that as it may, Colville's book is written fairly and with little bitterness. It throws instructive light on the staff arrangements existing at Lord Roberts's headquarters, and may be accepted on questions of fact as on the whole trustworthy.

The work of "Linesman" is of a totally different character. The writer, Captain Grant, Devonshire Regiment, was present as a company commander at all the actions on the Tugela. The *Times* in reviewing the work declared that "among the many books which have found their birth in the Campaign against the Boers this one stands out, not merely on account of the Author's literary merits, keen power of observation, and attractive phraseology, but in its unprejudiced comments and clever handling of battle impressions hitherto unattempted by contemporary writers. It is the work of an artist." This praise is not one whit too strong. Captain Grant's literary style is that of one both artist and dramatist who desires to bring before his reader's mind a vision of war as seen by an artist's eye, and who enforces attention by giving his vision a dramatic setting and surrounding it with such a wealth of color as to lift out of the commonplace even the most ordinary incident. To the civilian reader this method of writing military history comes as a revelation. He finds himself taken by the hand and placed in the very heart of the battle. He can hear the clock-clock of the Mauser rifle, the soft whit of the bullet as it flicks up the dust at his feet, and the crack of the shrapnel as it bursts overhead. He can see the men plunge forward on their faces as a straight shot arrests their rush; he can watch the flaming eyes and gripping hand of the survivors as they press home the final charge; his veins tingle with delight at the sound of the British cheer which carries the position. Yet to the professional soldier there is a little too much drama, and not quite enough scientific, unimpassioned attempt so to tell the tale of war as to help the student to master its true lessons. The book shows "Linesman" to be a keen observer and an artist to his finger-tips, but strategy is a matter with which he is rarely concerned, and a battle appears to represent to him little more than an exciting series of independent duels fought by companies with the force immediately opposing them. He fails somewhat to realize that the historian of a battle should study its details from the point of view rather of the General Staff than of a company leader.

One other book of this class deserves mention, *On the Heels of De Wet* by "The Intelligence Officer".¹ Its author did not hold a commission in the regular army, but commenced the campaign as one of the *Times* correspondents. In the later phases of the war he was gazetted to a Yeomanry regiment and attached as intelligence staff officer to a mobile column, which shared in the prolonged De Wet hunt. He describes in an admirable manner the difficulties

¹ London, 1902.

which beset the column and its intelligence staff in that task. Written with knowledge and humor, the book depicts the hopes and disappointments of guerrilla war; and although the suppression of names precludes its classification as history, yet it may well be run through by the historical student who desires to realize the atmosphere of that period, to get the smell of the veld in his nostrils, the whistle of the sniper's bullet in his ears, and the vision of the great, barren plateau, the boulder-strewn kopjes, and the stony drifts before his eyes.

We have considered as yet only English military. If they offer but scanty material for the historian to deal with, he must not hope for compensations from the other side. The Boer is more skilful with the rifle than with the pen, and although the present generation contains individuals such as Steyn, Louis Botha, Advocate Smuts, and others who hold their own in intellectual circles, a South African literature has yet to be made, and the Bible is still to the majority of Boers the only book required by man. To this lack of local demand must be attributed the fact that with one exception no Boer account of the Boer War has yet appeared. To soldiers as well as to the historian it is a matter of peculiar regret that the story of the gallant resistance against superior numbers made by a patriotic nation should not have been told by both sides. Nor does the solitary break in this self-imposed rule of silence compensate fully for the lack of other accounts. *Three Years' War*, by General De Wet,¹ although a book to be read, is in many ways disappointing. Dictated in haste from memory for the Continental market, it lacks the accuracy of historical work. Yet it cannot be neglected, for it sets down De Wet's recollections of his dramatic personal experiences, so far as a man who kept no notes and no diary can record facts accurately after a lapse of two years. Its very roughness and simplicity enable the reader to appreciate the merits and demerits of the author as a national leader. It is much to be hoped that other Boers will follow the example set by the late commander-general of the Free State, refreshing, however, their memories carefully from such historical records as they may possess. Military narratives by Generals Louis Botha, Delarey, and Cronje would be read eagerly by the British army and warmly welcomed.

Fortunately, however, there were with the Boers a few who by training and inclination were qualified to tell the truth frankly and impartially. Of the reports of the military attachés with the Boer forces, only one has been made public, that of Captain Carl Reich-

¹ London and New York, 1902.

mann, United States Army, extracts of which are to be found in *Reports on Military Operations in South Africa and China*, published by the Adjutant General's Office at Washington.¹ Captain Reichmann gives an excellent and informing sketch of the strength, organization, training, armament, and mobilization system of the Boers, and is, moreover, a valuable witness as to the facts connected with the actions at which he was present, which include most of the fights after Paardeberg up to the occupation of Pretoria. It is unnecessary to add that his report, as well as that of his colleague Captain Slocum,² has been read by British officers with close attention and respect. Next to Captain Reichmann the most valuable foreign witness is Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil, a retired French officer who took service under President Kruger and was killed in action at the head of his men near Boshof in April, 1900. His *War Notes*³ were written from day to day while actually at the front, and reveal unsparingly the fatal weakness inherent in ill-disciplined and untrained national forces such as the Boers. Its perusal excites emotions of sympathy for the professional soldier, who landed in South Africa so full of enthusiasm for what he regarded as a just cause, and whose trained eye saw, immediately on his arrival at the front the hopelessness of the whole business. Yet Villebois-Mareuil, having set his hand to the plow, looked not back, but did his duty till the God of Battles gave him his release. Other interesting foreign testimony to the Boer methods of fighting and the actual condition of affairs in the ranks of the commandos are to be found in *Ten Months in the Field with the Boers*,⁴ by a lieutenant of Villebois-Mareuil and in a book by a German officer, Captain Otto von Lossberg, *Mit Santa Barbara in Südafrika*.⁵

This completes the list of the more important unofficial historical material which has yet appeared. For the student who desires to gather his facts from original sources, the list cannot be said to be satisfactory. Even for the first part of the war, when the dramatic nature of the operations excited profound interest, the unofficial narratives are inadequate and unreliable. On the later phases, the long struggle between Lord Kitchener and De Wet's guerrilla bands, the books which have been written by eye-witnesses may be counted almost on the fingers of one hand. The regular war correspondents had in fact been recalled home, and the arrangements made for those "drives" which gradually sapped the Boer strength were too intricate and too confidential to be fully understood by any but the

¹ No. XXXIII. (July, 1901), Washington, 1901, pp. 93-259.

² *Ibid.*, 7-92.

³ London, 1901.

⁴ London, 1901.

⁵ Leipzig, 1903.

Headquarters Staff. The general public at home was, moreover, by this time becoming bored with the war and indifferent to the extraordinary difficulties of devising means for overcoming guerrilla tactics and capturing the guerrilla bands which were scattered throughout an area stretching from the Limpopo to the Cape Peninsula and from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic.

Fortunately in official documents may be found more complete and reliable records of both the earlier and the later phases of the war. These records, so far as yet published, consist of telegrams and despatches, the evidence given before the royal commission assembled to inquire into the South African War, and regimental histories. Official telegrams vary greatly in value. Some have been written for public consumption at times when it was of importance to conceal the real truth from the enemy. Others are of extraordinary historical value, but are often too confidential for publication at the time, and unless unearthed by Parliament for some special purpose are relegated to departmental pigeonholes, accessible only to the official historian. Despatches stand on a different footing. They are generally regarded with undue reverence as containing the full, accurate, and final report made by the commander-in-chief in the field to the government at home. Theoretically, no doubt, this is the case, but the resentment felt both by Parliament and by the public at the suppression or pruning of any portion of a general's despatches has long resulted in the adoption of other means for the unfolding of his mind to the Secretary of State for War. Nearly a hundred years ago Lord Liverpool instructed the Duke of Wellington to send home from the Peninsula two sets of despatches, one for public information, the other for the confidential perusal of the Cabinet. It is moreover a pleasing fallacy to imagine that all despatches are the *ipsissima verba* of the officer who signs them. This tradition dates from the days of Wellington, who had a special aptitude for the task, but in modern war a despatch, although written under a general's direction, is frequently drafted by one of his staff. In the British army this duty as a rule devolves on the military secretary. In other armies it falls on the Great General Staff. Nevertheless the general in command is responsible for the despatch as a whole, and often impresses upon it the stamp of his individuality.

Subject to these limitations, the South African despatches are full of interest and are of considerable historical importance, varying, however, with the idiosyncrasies of each commander, and the restraint imposed upon him by the situation at the moment of writing. Lord

Methuen's hastily indited communications from the battle-field are characterized by the enthusiasm of an officer exercising independent command for the first time. His engagements were described as the bloodiest known to modern war, and his traps as the most gallant. Sir George White's run on different lines. In the field that field-marshal has ever been a hot, impetuous fighter. But his reports are cold in the lucidity of their style, rigidly accurate in their facts, and masterly in their exposition of motives. Sir Redvers Buller is not equally happy. He sets forth his story plainly and simply; there are passages in his despatches—such as the famous "It was the men who did it" at the end of the report on the relief of Ladysmith—which stir a soldier's blood. Yet the true pathos of General Buller's reports lies in their revelation of himself, of that weakness of character and infirmity of purpose which hampered him and his troops so fatally. In this respect the Spion Kop despatches covering Warren's recrimination are indeed a tragedy. Lord Roberts's official letters are of a very different character. Drafted by the masterly pen of one of his staff, they set forth in perfect diction an admirable summary of the work done and the results achieved. In their criticism of subordinates these documents combine in an ideal manner a judicial spirit with definitiveness of decision. But from a historical point of view their reticence and brevity are a cause for regret. They give what they were intended to give, merely the outline of the picture; the details and the coloring must be filled in from other sources. Lord Kitchener's reports on the last eighteen months of the war are open to the same charge. Written at periodical intervals, they are limited to a mere summary of such events as could from time to time without inconveniences to the service be communicated to the public press in England. They were meant merely for popular consumption at the moment, and although in a sense forming a useful sort of diary of events, can hardly be regarded as serious official documents.

Material of even greater interest and importance than that in official despatches may be found abundantly by the historian in the *Minutes of Evidence* taken by the Royal Commission on the South African War. Here are printed *in extenso* the actual warnings—and they were many and frankly worded—given to the British government by the Intelligence Division of the War Office during the three years preceding the war. Here is set out to what extent and why these warnings were disregarded. The exact strength and disposition of the troops in South Africa at the outbreak of the war are given in these volumes. Each commander, Roberts,

Kitchener, White, Buller, Warren, Methuen, Gatacre, French, Hunter, Ian Hamilton, Colvile, Kekewich, Baden-Powell, and many others state in turn his version of the part he played in the war, and of the motives by which he was guided. The gaps are filled in by the evidence of staff and departmental officers. The characteristics, the weakness, and the strength of the troops which fought in South Africa, and of the machinery for their administration are set forth in full, and commented upon by both professional and amateur observers. No government and no army administration have perhaps ever before placed their cards on the table after this fashion on the conclusion of a war. Unfortunately this very frankness defeated the object aimed at, the institution of a sound system of army reform. The *Report* was published in the holiday season, and created a momentary sensation, but the evidence was too voluminous. Not one man in a thousand, possibly not one man in a million of the population of the United Kingdom has ever studied carefully these unique volumes of the testimony of men who have seen the truth and know it.

The newspaper summaries of the *Report* were alone scanned by the general public, and with such unappreciative carelessness that the nation a few months later allowed itself to be lulled to sleep again by another report, that of the Esher Committee. Whether army reformers will ever now digest the evidence given before the War Commission seems doubtful, but for the historian at any rate there are few documents which will repay more fully exhaustive study.

A good regimental history with a clear account of the part played by an individual unit in a campaign, its marches, formations, and triumphs is a real treasure-trove to the writer of military history. Unfortunately the South African campaign has failed to produce the abundant crop of such works that might have been expected. With some exceptions, such as the Guards, the Inniskilling Dragoons, the Royal Scots, the Yorkshire Regiment, the Rifle Brigade, the Essex, and the Connaught Rangers, regimental achievements remain unrecorded, or, if written, have not been published. The omission is surprising, for in no other army is regimental *esprit de corps* more cherished and regimental distinctions more tenaciously maintained than in the British service. The explanations of this neglect would seem to be that the value of historical records was not appreciated by regimental officers before the war, and, except as a disagreeable form of mental torture invented for examination purposes, the study of military history was rarely

attempted. A new era has since dawned. Throughout the winter months the regimental officer under the supervision of his lieutenant-colonel now devotes much attention to the examination of past campaigns and to the deduction therefrom of lessons for the future. When next the British army takes the field, the necessity for noting its methods of action and their results will be understood.

Such then is the historical material at the disposal of the student who desires to undertake original researches as to the true facts of the South African War. It must be candidly admitted that the prospect is not at the present encouraging, and the searcher after knowledge will find himself compelled to ask for help from the labors of others who have enjoyed special advantages and had access to persons and documents unapproachable by the general public.

We will turn, therefore, to the works of actual laborers in the historical vineyard. The fashion has grown up in England—I do not know whether it is prevalent in the United States—of issuing, during the progress of a war which attracts public attention, profusely illustrated popular books, which profess to lay before their readers history, red-hot from its making like a baker's rolls. These works no doubt answer their publishers' purpose. They have a considerable although purely ephemeral sale, and in the case of a national struggle fan a healthy spirit of patriotism. But it must be confessed that they have no pretension to be included in the historian's library. Their text is for the most part compiled by the scissors and paste process from the columns of newspapers. Their illustrations are strangely dissimilar to the realities of modern war, and are often palpably the work of artists who have never been under fire, and whose acquaintance with battle-fields is limited to a study of Napoleonic pictures and of melodrama as presented by the suburban stage. It is unnecessary therefore to trouble the readers of this review by enumerating works of this class given birth to by the South African War. Their brief day has passed and, save to satisfy curiosity, it would be waste of time to dip into their pages. Their elimination, however, limits—at the moment of writing—the number of actual histories of the campaign which will repay careful examination to three, Dr. Conan Doyle's *Great Boer War*,¹ the *Times History of the War in South Africa*,² and the English translation of the account of the war compiled by the Great General Staff at Berlin.³

¹ Revised and enlarged edition, New York, 1902.

² Four volumes published, 1900, 1902, 1905, 1906.

³ Two vols., London, 1904, 1906.

Dr. Doyle's work is the only popular narrative of the war which has any just claim to be regarded as history. It compresses within the pages of a handy volume the story of the whole campaign from start to finish. Whatever Conan Doyle writes has a swing and a sparkle of its own, but on this occasion he has aimed higher than merely to interest and amuse. He desired, as a good Englishman, to lay before his fellow-countrymen in a compact form a reliable narrative of the prolonged struggle. He lost no opportunity of collecting at first hand, and of insuring, so far as may be, accuracy in his statements. The results of his efforts may on the whole be said to be not unsatisfactory. The work was produced too soon to rank as a reliable historical authority. Its details are in places distressingly inaccurate. Yet on the whole Conan Doyle paints a not untruthful general picture of the campaign, a picture which may be scanned with advantage by the reader who has not the time or inclination for more extensive study. Indeed even for the more earnest student it forms at present the only coherent and complete account of the last phase of the war which has yet been published.

The *Times History* stands on a higher foundation and has a higher claim for respectful reception. The advantages enjoyed by the compilers are probably greater than any ever possessed by unofficial writers undertaking such a task. The *Times*, it is true, can no longer be regarded as an infallible guide to changes in public opinion. The decision on the final appeal of the people at a general election lies now in the hands of the masses, to whom the *Times* is but a name. Yet as a source of information, as an organ to which the leaders of every school of thought address their observations on current affairs, the *Times* is indispensable for all who desire to keep themselves fully up to date in the development of thought in England. It is thus the one paper which all men regard with a certain reverence and even fear. The support of the *Times* is a factor which no public man can afford to despise, be he statesman or soldier. Its influence is potent even on a campaign. A general who is attacked vehemently by this journal knows that it may become difficult for the government to retain him in command. The leader whom the *Times* belauds may snap his fingers at other criticism. The knowledge of this influence insures—although, be it said to the credit of the British officer, with some exceptions—that the representatives of the *Times* at the seat of war receive favorable treatment. Its correspondents in South Africa—and they were numerous—enjoyed therefore as a rule the best facilities for acquiring

information as to the inner history of the conduct of the campaign. Nor was that all. As soon as it became known that that journal proposed to produce a history of the war and had appointed Mr. L. S. Amery, its chief correspondent in South Africa, as its editor, there was a disposition both amongst the higher authorities and amongst regimental officers to assist in the task. The *Times* reaped the benefit of that reputation for impartiality which on the whole is justly its due. Equipped with these military advantages and with the other resources of a great journal, very high expectations were formed of the history which would be produced under such auspices. It is perhaps a matter of opinion how far these expectations have been fulfilled in the first three volumes. The first, it is true, is in every way worthy of its birthplace. Dealing exhaustively with the course of the war, it sets forth with excellent judgment and tact the history of the political disputes between Great Britain and the South African Republic, which were so abruptly referred to the arbitration of arms by President Kruger's ultimatum. The righteousness of the British cause, and the truth that the sole object of Lord Salisbury's government was to obtain "equal rights for all white men in South Africa" are vindicated with a lucidity and accuracy unlikely to be surpassed. The volume may therefore be accepted as a complete historical statement of Great Britain's case. The second volume opens with the story of the actual campaign, and carries it forward to the events of the "Black Week" with its triple defeats of Stormberg, Magersfontein, and Colenso. The third covers the ground from the decision to send out Lord Roberts to the occupation of Bloemfontein. The *Times* contemporaries have, with one exception, been unanimous in giving a reception no less favorable to these two volumes than that accorded to the first. The second volume was read eagerly by the general public, and was regarded for the moment as fulfilling in every way the requirements of military history. The marked diminution of interest in South African War literature which lapse of time and the overshadowing of that campaign by events in the Far East have occasioned much reduced the number of readers of the third volume, but by those civilians who have read it it is certainly deemed to reach the high standard of its predecessors. From a literary point of view, so far as men whose trade it is to fight and not to make literature may judge, soldiers indorse this verdict. The ease with which the writers unravel their intricate story and unroll before the reader's eye the varying drama of the war discloses literary gifts of the highest order, and stamps the book as one which, what-

ever its historical merits, will live for many generations. But both for soldier and for historian this alone does not suffice. For them the crucial tests are, first, accuracy in statement of fact and, secondly, a right judgment in the inferences to be drawn from the facts. As regards the first test, accuracy, the two volumes differ much in merit. The second, dealing with the earliest phases of the war, was brought out somewhat rapidly with the object of achieving a large sale before the interest of the general public had begun to fade. Its writers moreover did not quite realize the length of time needed for historical researches. They labored moreover under the serious disadvantage of going to press before the *Report* of the Royal Commission was published, thus missing much important material. For these reasons the second volume cannot be accepted as a satisfactory record of the events of the campaign down to the battle of Colenso. Its very wealth of detail is the more dangerous as serving to conceal imperfect knowledge and inaccurate statements. The third volume is free from such blemishes. There are slips here and there, but on the whole the two years' longer labor expended on it have enabled the writers to attain a degree of accuracy very superior to that displayed in the second.

But in history of every description, and especially military history, facts are in one sense unimportant. What really matters are the lessons to be drawn from the facts, and in a secondary degree the judgments to be pronounced on individuals. Weighed in this balance with each other, the second and third volumes are by no means even, and yet both have in common a grave defect, the over-severity which characterizes the criticism of an amateur who has mastered the jargon of a science and some of the science, but does not appreciate the difficulty of its technique. In the second volume this over-severity is so marked a feature as to be not only a grave injustice to individuals but even a distortion of the whole historical focus of the campaign. Sir George White, for instance, is criticized with a certain contemptuous air of superior knowledge for not having sent away his cavalry before the siege of Ladysmith, and for not having increased the fourteen miles of his line of defense to twenty by the inclusion therein of Bulwana Mountain. No professional soldier would have perpetrated such a blunder as to place side by side two criticisms which are mutually self-destructive. If the cavalry had been sent out of Ladysmith, the force left would have been inadequate to hold the line of defense. Its curtailment, not enlargement, would have been instantly forced on the general in command, and no curtailment was possible without surrendering

to the enemy positions which would have rendered prolonged defense impossible. Yet the writers of this volume have evidently no particular animus against the defender of Ladysmith. On the whole perhaps they treat him with more fairness than other leaders, but they pose too much as frank and candid critics of the British army, assuming as the foundation of their criticism that our difficulties in South Africa during the war of 1899-1900 were entirely due to the imperfect training of the troops and the incapacity of their commanders. The assumption is untrue and, being untrue, has led to a false standard of criticism and to the painting of a false picture. That the British army had much to learn in South Africa, and that many mistakes were made, every member of it will admit; but this admission must equally be made in every campaign by every army. The real cause of the gravity of the situation in Natal and Cape Colony in the last quarters of 1899 was the fact that the British government had allowed its diplomacy to outstrip its preparation for war. The twin sisters strategy and policy were not moving forward hand in hand, and their separation left British generals to face in the field an enemy not merely superior in numbers, a matter which could have been regarded with equanimity, but greatly superior in mobility and in knowledge of the country. This, and not the imperfections of officers and men, is the true governing factor of the whole of the first phase of the South African War. In failing to realize its importance the *Times* historian has placed that phase in a false focus, and thus distorted the reader's appreciation of its lessons.

The same error, though in another form, appears in the third volume, notwithstanding its historical value as a narrative of facts. It is tinged throughout with the Carthaginian tradition of crucifying the unsuccessful general. Its criticisms are in the main sound. Indeed there are grounds for believing that they are based on opinions of a body of experts held in respect by soldiers throughout the civilized world. The marked similarity between the general conclusions set forth in the *Times History* as to the operations on the Tugela and the events of Lord Roberts's march on Bloemfontein and those which appeared later in the account issued by the German General Staff is very noticeable, and, if rumor be correct, is not due to any mere accidental coincidence in opinion. The Berlin narrative calls attention to the imperfections in staff work in both the eastern and the western theatres of war; it condemns in clear language the desire to find a new way to victory without shedding of blood, which marked Sir Redvers Buller's battles on the Tugela

and Lord Roberts's enveloping tactics at Poplar Grove and subsequent actions. The *Times* historian accepts in these respects the German Staff's criticism, but, while the latter state their views in quiet professional language, which is helpful without being offensive, the former cannot resist scourging his victims with whips steeped in acid brine. For absolute disregard of the feelings both of the living and of the friends of the dead no more striking example can be found in modern English literature than the manner in which Hannay's ill-timed charge at Paardeberg is portrayed by the *Times* historian. A mistake was of course made, and a badly worded order was badly interpreted, but it is rank brutality to depict the gallant Hannay as a mad fool, uselessly driven to death by a relentless taskmaster.

The German General Staff's history of the South African War is confined to two volumes which deal in detail with the campaign down to the seizure of Bloemfontein, although a brief strategical précis of the after course of the war is appended. Its fairness of tone has already been noted. The criticisms are throughout the criticisms of professional soldiers with a just appreciation of the difficulties of the tasks confronting a commander in the field. When censure is pronounced, there is a certain graceful reluctance to condemn a comrade. The charges of inhumanity, so freely levelled at one time by Continental critics against the British army, are repudiated emphatically. The courage and devotion to duty displayed by officers and men are handsomely acknowledged. The German account is thus a work which all British soldiers can read without offense and which the soldiers of all armies may read with profit. Its translation—the first volume by Colonel Waters, and the second by Lieutenant-colonel Du Cane—is admirably done; the maps and plans which illustrate the two, although inferior to those of the *Times History*, suffice for their purpose.

It cannot be held that either of these three histories forms an adequate record of the South African struggle. That war is, it is true, not to be compared either in strategical importance or in immediate political results with the Civil War in America, the Franco-German War, or the Manchurian campaign. Yet it was the first example of a combat in which both sides were armed with magazine-rifles and smokeless powder. On the Boer side it represents a gallant struggle made by two little communities against great odds. To Englishmen, although the strain of the combat was not so great as to test fully the strength of the empire, it presents both a warning and an encouragement: a warning of the

danger of indifference to preparation for war, and an encouragement in the belief that the British empire, if forethought be but exercised, will be true to and sufficient for itself in the time of danger. But besides these considerations the South African War in the vastness of its theatre, in its distance of six thousand miles from the British base, in its improvised army recruited from every quarter of the globe, and in its prolonged guerrilla phase presents features of profound professional interest to the statesman and the soldier.

The British government has therefore done well to sanction and direct the preparation of an official history of the war which both in its statements of facts and in its criticisms may be accepted as authoritative. The ferment of perpetual reorganization in which the unhappy War Office has seethed during recent years has not yet permitted the creation of a historical section of the General Staff. The compilation of the official history was therefore originally intrusted to Lieutenant-colonel G. F. Henderson, who served on Lord Roberts's staff as Director of Military Intelligence, and whose inimitable work on Stonewall Jackson may be said to have won for him cosmopolitan reputation. Unhappily for the interests of history, and still more unhappily for the British army, death removed that talented writer after some eighteen months spent in preliminary researches and in drafting an introductory volume dealing with the causes of the war. Major-general Sir Frederick Maurice, the official historian of the Egyptian campaign of 1882, and the author of the article on "War" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, was selected to take up the reins thus dropped. General Maurice had not the good fortune to be employed in the late South African campaign. He enjoys therefore now an impartial position, and will be able without bias to bring to bear on the various problems of the war a sound military judgment and the knowledge acquired by many years of study as Professor of Strategy at the Staff College.

The first instalment of the result of General Maurice's labors will be published immediately, perhaps before this article appears. Mr. Balfour's Cabinet decided, it is understood, before leaving office to suppress the first volume prepared by Colonel Henderson, deeming for various reasons that it is undesirable to introduce matters of political controversy into a military work published by authority. The decision not only deprived the world of the last product of Henderson's able pen, but certainly enhanced the difficulty of General Maurice's task. Policy and strategy are too closely

intertwined in practice to be thus severed from each other surgically by the historian, and cast mutilated into separate compartments for examination. The whole dispositions of the British troops both in Cape Colony and in Natal at the outbreak of the war were based on political rather than on strategical considerations. It is notorious that political pressure forced Lord Roberts to undertake the relief of Kimberley as his primary objective. As a strategist he would have shut his ears to the cries of its inhabitants for instant succor. It is notorious too that throughout the war the political attitude of the Cape Colonists was a far greater anxiety to successive British commanders-in-chief than the strength of the Boers actually in the field. Mr. Balfour's decision therefore is an additional proof that British statesmen have yet much to learn as to the true relationship between strategy and policy. How far General Maurice will find it possible to surmount or evade the obstacle which has thus been placed across his path will shortly be learned. His name is a guaranty that a conscientious endeavor is being made to place the whole truth before the world without partiality or concealment. There is some reason therefore to hope that the four volumes to which the official history of the South African War is to be confined will present to the world a just, accurate, and final record of that campaign.

Since the above was written the first volume of the official *History of the War in South Africa*¹ published by the British War Office has appeared. The authors are not, as is the usual practice in most armies, the General Staff; for the reorganization of Pall Mall, carried out on the injunctions of the famous Esher Committee two years ago, omitted to establish any Historical Section, whose duty it would be to collate from the past the lessons of war. The compilation of the South African War history was, therefore, intrusted to Major-general Sir Frederick Maurice, a retired officer with a considerable reputation as a military writer, assisted by a staff, mainly also composed of retired officers.

Three features stand out prominently in the narrative which has thus been prepared: (1) the omission of the causes of the war, (2) the extreme accuracy of the narrative itself, and (3) the brevity and restraint of its criticisms.

The omission of the causes of the war is much to be regretted. But if the commencement of the official *History* is therefore maimed and imperfect, the fault is not attributable to General Maurice, but

¹ London, Hurst and Blackett, 1906.

to Mr. Balfour's Cabinet. It is only fair, however, to add that this decision was due not to any doubts as to the righteousness of the British case, but to a desire to let bygones be bygones in South Africa.

Save this single defect, the official *History* would appear to serve well the purpose for which it has been written, namely, the instruction of the army. The popularity of the *Times History* is more evident amongst amateurs than with professional readers. The sting and virulence of its irresponsible criticism attract the former (who revel in its pungency) but repel the latter, who know the true difficulties of war. Moreover, in the second volume at least, the accuracy of its narrative is not altogether above suspicion. The official *History* has a truer aim; in accuracy of statement it leaves nothing to be desired, while for the most part it seeks to present the facts to the reader in so clear a form that, given ordinary professional judgment and knowledge, he can deduce therefrom the true lessons. The soldier who studies the *Times History* has thrust under his eyes a key to all the problems which present themselves for solution, but, if his mind be already stored with a knowledge of war and if his judgment be unbiassed, he will find reason to doubt the infallibility of the key. If on the other hand he reads the official *History*, he must exert his own mental faculties to arrive at the true solution, but he will find them stimulated and assisted by undoubtedly impartial narratives, written by soldiers for the information of soldiers.

The authors of the *Times History* are no doubt patriotic Englishmen who desire to drive home into the English nation and army the true lessons of the war. But the army mistrusts the virulence of its criticisms, while the British nation has been encouraged by this very virulence in its extraordinary delusion that every civilian knows more about the art of war than a professional soldier. The nation, moreover, is at the present moment in one of those moods in which it regards all military questions with apathetic cynicism. It is unlikely, therefore, to study a book like the official *History*, which fails to afford the attraction of the impalement of unsuccessful generals. By the soldier, however, who desires to master his profession, the official *History of the War in South Africa* will be found a mine in which true ore can be dug. To the impartial historical student it presents evidence which may be accepted as above suspicion.

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